

It's Morning Now (It's Brighter Now) by aktura

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Summary:

When Steve follows Dustin out to California in late summer of '89, neither of them have a solid long term plan for the future, except for simply spending that future together. Because anything's better than fucking Hawkins, Indiana.

Or: Dustin's met Richie Tozier all of once, briefly in passing, which is one time too many and wasn't briefly enough, in Dustin's opinion.

It's Morning Now (It's Brighter Now)

Author's Note:

Brain: why does every. single. franchise seem to have a character named Steve?

Me: haha, yeah, that's stupid.

Me: ...

Me: unless...

Brain: oh no.

Anyway. This is me using this observation for my own purposes as I marry my favorite son (Stranger Things) to my new obsession (Stephen King's IT). *[slams hand on desk]* It is law! (But seriously, has this take been done before? I feel like this must have been done before).

I kind of imagine Steve and Dustin's backstory in this to be kind of close to the one found in the *All's Well That Ends Well (To End Up With You)* 'verse, although this isn't the career I picture Steve ending up with in that universe (...or is it?). But either way, there's obviously no killer alien clown in the lives of the Steve and Dustin from the *All's Well...* verse, so I'm not going to tag this as part of that series. If you haven't read any of the previous fics, all you really need to know is that Steve and Dustin start dating after Dustin turns sixteen.

Lastly, I'm aware that fic has, like, a potential audience of one (1) and I don't even care. Whoever you are out there, enjoy! I wrote this mainly for myself. :)

Title from Taylor Swift's *Daylight*.

Steve's pacing the length of their living room when Dustin steps through the front door.

It's a Friday afternoon, close to six o'clock, and Dustin's spent all day looking forward to a relaxing evening on the couch, but judging by the way Steve's stomping his way around the room, that might not be in the cards right now.

Steve's on the phone, so preoccupied with the call that he doesn't seem to notice Dustin's arrival, so Dustin quietly closes the door behind him and toes his shoes off as he watches Steve move across the hardwood floor. He guesses Steve probably hasn't been into the office today – he's dressed in shorts and a tank top, and his hair's soft where it curls gently against his temples, getting long again, almost due for another cut. Dustin would never begrudge Steve the freedom of being able to work from home, though he sometimes wishes he had the same opportunity.

He pads into the room as Steve stops to lean against the door frame of the sliding door that opens up into the backyard. The sheer white curtains that frame the wall of windows on either side of the door sway gently in the cool afternoon breeze, and Steve cuts a dark silhouette as he peers out into the sun drenched yard.

The house might be all glass and angles and white everything – typical L.A. fair – but the backyard is what attracted them to the place to begin with; the outdoor seating area, the pool, and, beyond that, the lawn that requires watering several times a week just to stay green. It looks nothing like Indiana, but somehow still manages to bring back memories of Hawkins – good memories, of long summer days hanging out around the pool at Steve's house, of being young and careless and free, the Upside Down feeling more and more like a barely remembered nightmare rather than something that really happened.

Dustin kissed Steve for the first time in the doorway of that house, curls dripping wet after his swim, water sticking his shirt to his back, heart in his throat. The sun and the artificial blue shade of the water in the pool – it's the same here as it was there, then, and the memory is almost enough to make Dustin taste the sweetness of the Coke he'd downed to kill his nerves before stepping up and planting a big one on his best friend.

“Hey. It's me again—” Steve says as he turns to resume his pacing,

carefully avoiding stepping on the mess of wires and plastic slowly crawling its way across the rug with jerky motions.

The robot – LaR-1478, or Larry, for short – is the latest prototype Dustin’s brought home from the lab to test in real life conditions. Steve’s pretty much the only spouse left who still puts up with experimental technology in the home – understandable, after the rogue AI carpet cleaner incident at Martin’s house – but while he might give Dustin shit about it (because they’re childhood friends turned more and that’s the way they roll), Dustin knows that Steve doesn’t really mind.

It’s something the guys at the lab are vaguely envious of, and the fact that they consider Steve a real catch solely based on his willingness to allow questionable tech in his home amuses Dustin to no end.

Steve makes another round of the room, side-stepping Larry this time, and Larry beeps in acknowledgment of the movement. It’s a robot vacuum cleaner prototype capable of climbing stairs – as well as pet friendly! – and Dustin’s still trying to iron out the last of the kinks in the programing. Mostly this consists of watching it climb up and down the stairs like a proud father, complete with fretting over it whenever it takes a tumble, all the while Steve rolls his eyes at him from what he deems a safe distance (“You *sure* it won’t explode?”).

“—need you to call me back as soon as you hear this, okay?” Steve’s speaking into the phone now. “You can’t just *disappear* like this! You fucker, if you’re lying dead in a ditch somewhere I’m gonna kill you myself before I drag you back to rehab, so help me—”

Dustin sighs and makes his way over, reaching out to rub at the tense line of muscle between Steve’s shoulders. Steve leans into the touch, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath before slowly releasing it.

“I mean it, Richie,” he speaks into the voicemail on the other end of the line and then, with a tone of finality; “Call me.”

Dustin nudges him towards the couch, feeling a flash of irritation run through him. “He still hasn’t called you back?” he whispers, because Steve looks tired and like he’s one loud noise away from a migraine.

Steve shakes his head and disconnects the call. “I’ve left, like, fifty messages,” he groans as he sinks down onto the couch. “Fuck, I should’ve stayed and looked for him.”

“And searched the whole city?” It’s a conversation they’ve had more than once since Richie walked off the stage and into the night and Steve was forced to fly back to L.A. without him.

“You should’ve seen him. He was *spooked*. Whoever called— His hands were shaking like crazy.” Steve holds his own hand out as if to demonstrate, and Dustin takes it and cradles it between his two.

“C’mon,” he says. “He’s pulled this kind of thing before. It’s not the first time, right?”

“No,” Steve admits, sounding almost a bit reluctant to do so. “But Dave emailed me and he’s about to walk. If Richie doesn’t call me back tonight, I’m probably gonna have to find him a new agent.” He reaches for his phone, swiping across the screen to unlock it. “I gotta —” he sighs, and Dustin leans forward to press a kiss against Steve’s temple.

“I’ll fix dinner,” he says, and leaves Steve to his work.

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Steve’s the one who comes up with the idea.

“So, I’ve been thinking,” he says one evening in early May, after he’s picked Dustin up from his house. “We should just drive out there.”

It’s raining and windy, and Dustin can’t feel his face anymore as he climbs into the car, because the gusts are picking up the rain and turning the droplets into tiny needles against his skin; even the short run from his front door to the Beemer was enough to turn his cheeks numb and his nose red.

The average temperature has barely broken into the fifties in the past two weeks, but Steve’s got the heat on inside his car. Dustin gratefully sinks into the passenger seat – which is basically molded to the shape of his body after all these years – and thinks about California; how it’s probably much warmer there at the moment, and

how even when there's bad weather, it's probably not as miserable as Hawkins, Indiana.

"We can make a road trip out of it," Steve is saying, eyes on the road. "See the sights. Like Yellowstone!"

"That's in Wyoming," Dustin says, and when Steve shoots him a confused look, he adds, "but yeah, that's a good idea. We could do that. Yellowstone would be a bit of a detour, but maybe— maybe the Grand Canyon, or Las Vegas."

Steve grins, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel as downtown Hawkins comes into view. "If we go to Vegas, I'm gonna win us a million bucks," he declares, easing them into a stop at the intersection where Cornwallis cuts through Oak Street.

Dustin snorts, watching the traffic light overhead remain stubbornly red even though they're the only car waiting to cross. The sound of the rain hitting the roof of the BMW grows louder as the wind picks up, and the few remaining pedestrians still braving the weather on Oak Street all seem to give up the fight at the same time; Dustin watches as one by one they duck into the closest public building to seek shelter.

"With your luck you'd probably *lose* us a million bucks," he tells Steve. "We'll end up washing dishes to pay it off."

"What?" Steve says, managing to portray a pretty good air of being deeply wounded, and Dustin bites his lip and tries not to smile. Out on the sidewalk a man struggles with his umbrella against the wind before managing to wrestle it into submission and escape into the library.

"I've got awesome luck!" Steve continues. He leans over the center console, looking past Dustin like he's checking the street even though it's obviously empty, and once he seems satisfied that it's clear, he tilts his head to the side, right into Dustin's space, and presses his lips against Dustin's.

Dustin hums in surprise, feeling his pulse pick up at the thought of kissing Steve in public, where anyone who dares to brave the weather

can see. He kisses back anyway, pressing his still-cold fingers against the side of Steve's neck and feeling him shiver.

"Dude, you're freezing – stop poking at me," Steve groans, breath hitching as Dustin hooks his fingers beneath Steve's collar. "Dustin—"

But Dustin ignores him, resting his fingertips against the hollow at the base of Steve's throat, feeling him swallow. He doesn't care who can see them now, because with every passing day it dawns on him just a little bit more that this is actually going to happen – that Steve is actually going to follow him out of this fucking town – and it's a heady kind of knowledge that produces a rush that makes him feel almost invincible.

They've spent the past few years circling around it, this idea of leaving Hawkins together once Dustin's graduated. They've spent a lot of time talking about it, too – holed up in Dustin's room, poring over school applications; on long, destination-less drives in Steve's car; at night, curled up in Steve's bed under the covers, whispering in the dark – and they might not have a solid, long term plan for the future (not unless you count just... spending it together), but short term?

Short term is easier. It might be a rough outline of wishes and best case scenarios, but they're getting there. They're making it happen. Dustin's all set to attend Caltech on a scholarship starting in September, and that's what he'll focus on for the four years it will take to receive his degree in Mechanical Engineering. Steve will get a job in the meantime and try to figure out what he wants to do with his life, and once Dustin's graduated and Steve's got a goal in mind, well—

They'll just have to see where life takes them. Because anything's better than fucking Hawkins, Indiana.

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Dustin's met Richie Tozier all of once, briefly in passing, which is one time too many and wasn't briefly enough, in Dustin's opinion.

Richie's a douchebag; one of those shock comics who makes a living

out of verbally abusing their girlfriend on stage – that is, when he’s not talking about fucking other women behind her back, or singing the praises of his dick, which he lovingly refers to as ‘Paul’.

Normally, Dustin would wonder how any woman could put up with that kind of treatment, no matter how many houses Richie owns – because it’s definitely not his personality, or his dick (probably), or his looks, seeing as he’s a pasty, out of shape forty-year-old white guy who sweats a lot and likes to replace the water lost through perspiration by frequenting every bar in Los Angeles. So yeah, Dustin would be totally bewildered if not for the fact that he knows that there’s no girlfriend.

There’s no girlfriend, and most of what Richie’s spouting on stage isn’t even his own material, despite Steve swearing that Richie can be funny when he wants to be – genuinely, belly achingly funny, without any input from anyone else. Dustin is doubtful and Richie is too, apparently, because Steve’s hinted suggestions of maybe dumping the team of ghostwriters hiding in the wings are always brushed aside with a joke, as if Richie’s content to remain a D-list comic regurgitating other people’s material to an audience of drunk frat boys and bachelor parties.

Dustin has been able to sense Steve’s slowly mounting frustration with the whole thing for a while now, and he honestly can’t wrap his mind around why Steve insists on keeping Richie on as a client. He says as much early one Tuesday morning, after the blare of Steve’s cellphone has startled them both awake at 1:30 AM; it’s the bartender from one of the downtown joints, informing Steve that Richie’s just been cut off and that they don’t trust him to make it home on his own without tripping over his own feet and dying face down in a gutter, so would Steve please come take him off their hands?

Steve shakes his head as the call disconnects, blearily blinking down at the screen of his phone, and says, in response to Dustin’s muttered question, “I don’t know. He just— he reminds me of myself, I guess.”

“That’s—” Dustin starts, but can’t even begin to wrap his head around it. “No, you’re gonna have to explain that one to me. *How?*”

“Not, like, *this* me. But how I felt before I met you. All of you.” Steve

turns to look at him, his features just barely visible in the soft glow of the city lights slipping through the half-drawn curtains of their bedroom. “He’s loud and flashy, but he’s lonely, too. He’s missing something, and I think he knows it. Does that make sense?” He runs a hand through this hair, as if talking about it brings all of the anxiety of youth back. “I kinda felt like that too, as a kid. I mean, it never made me want to try to drown myself in booze like Richie seems to be doing, but on the other hand I found you guys pretty early on, and that pulled me out of it. I think Richie’s just— given up on looking, at this point.”

Dustin reaches out to trail his hand down the back of Steve’s arm, feeling him shiver at the touch.

“Yeah,” he carefully says. “I guess that could make sense.” He tries to keep the doubt out of his voice, because Steve has always been the better of the two of them at reading people. “So is that what you’re trying to do? Help him find whatever it is he’s stopped looking for?”

Steve shoots him a small smile in the dark. “Nah,” he says. “I’m just gonna be there if he needs me. Which, yeah, has been pretty often lately.” He reaches out to wrap his fingers around Dustin’s forearm, giving him an affectionate squeeze. “Thank you for that, by the way. For putting up with it. I know it’s a lot, and I know you think he’s a douche, but if I fired all my clients based on that, I wouldn’t have any left.”

“Debra’s not too bad,” Dustin concedes, and Steve’s smile grows into a delighted, albeit sleepy, grin.

“I knew you’d come around!” he croons, leaning down to kiss Dustin and humming in approval when Dustin curls an arm around his shoulders to prevent him from pulling away. “Dee,” he sighs into Dustin’s mouth, “I need to get going before Richie starts fighting someone for their drink.”

Dustin grunts in reply. “Fine,” he says, pushing at Steve’s shoulder. “Your breath stinks anyway.”

Steve laughs, ducking down to steal another kiss before he crawls out of bed and starts to pick his clothes off the floor from where he

dropped them the night before. Dustin watches him get dressed – admires the graceful lines of Steve’s upper back as he bends to step into his jeans, the dimples above his ass as he stretches to shrug into his shirt; still startlingly attractive to Dustin even on this side of forty – but it’s too early to get worked up about it, so instead Dustin settles in for another few hours of sleep as Steve quietly slips out of the bedroom.

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California is roughly two thousand miles away, but for some reason it’s the first few that feel the longest.

Dustin’s been out of Hawkins before – he didn’t even move here until the fourth grade – but whatever excursions he’s had in the past have never felt as final as driving past the sign that informs him that he’s now leaving Hawkins, won’t he come again soon?

“No fucking thank you,” he mutters, gripping the steering wheel tight and feeling the vibrations of the tires eating up the road.

He’s in Mrs. Gillespie’s old Buick Estate with Yurtle’s tank carefully strapped into the backseat, because the Beemer didn’t have enough space to fit all the things they want to bring with them, and the Buick had been sitting unused and rusting in Mrs. Gillespie’s driveway since she stopped driving on account of her nerves a couple of years ago.

It was an easy decision to offer her a couple hundred bucks to take it off her hands, and it’d only taken them two weeks to get it back into good enough shape for a cross country trip. Once that was done and the Buick was up and running, it had merely been a matter of loading both cars up and saying their goodbyes.

And that turns out to be the hardest part, because Dustin’s mom wouldn’t stop crying, and it kind of turned contagious to the point that Will was wiping away tears during the Party group hug and Robin, who was home from college for the summer, was suspiciously misty eyed even as she kept punching Steve in the arm and threatening him with violence if he even thought about forgetting their weekly phone calls.

The more miles they cover the easier it starts to feel though, because as Dustin pushes the Buick to keep up with Beemer as Steve leads the way out of Hawkins, it starts to sink in that as much as they're leaving everything behind, they're also headed towards something just as great.

It's too corny a thought to share, so he doesn't, but later on, when they're standing at the rim of the Grand Canyon, sunburned and silent in the face of the drop before them, Dustin reaches out to take Steve's hand. And it feels like a natural thing, then, to dare to lean over and, in the sunlight in full view of everyone, place a kiss on the bare skin of Steve's shoulder where the arm of his t-shirt's rucked up.

They've signed the lease for a small two-bedroom apartment a stone's throw away from the Caltech campus. It comes unfurnished, but the location makes up for it, and they spend their first day in Pasadena unloading all of their stuff out of their cars and into their new place.

On paper they're flatmates, but the second mattress they haul up the stairs is just for show; it goes into the smaller bedroom turned guestroom, and as soon as the cars are unpacked and Yurtle's tank is safely installed in the living room, Dustin herds Steve into the larger bedroom – *their* bedroom – and pushes him down onto the bare mattress on the floor and lets him curl his fingers into Dustin's hair and hold on as Dustin uses his mouth to take him apart.

It's a good start to the rest of their lives.

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Steve gets a job at a bar. He's not great at mixing drinks, but he brings in the women – college girls in particular seem to gravitate to him – and he likes to talk to people. He's good at it, charming and pleasant to the point that even though he can be a dumbass, he's still likable and nonthreatening and goodlooking enough to get away with more than most probably would.

And as it turns out, when you're an adult, being likable and good at talking can get you *connections*. Because apparently there's a thin line between shooting the shit with strangers and networking, and it quickly becomes apparent that Steve's a master at walking that

tightrope of a line; while Dustin's busy trying to learn his way around campus and pulling all-nighters trying to pass his classes, Steve starts making friends through work, expanding his social circle and introducing all of his new friends to each other.

He drags Dustin with him to house parties – keggers in Pasadena at first, but as time goes by they seem to frequent Brentwood and Hollywood and Beverly Hills more and more. Dustin good-naturedly suffers through it all, if only because he loves watching Steve in his element, and it seems like a natural progression when, one day twenty five years later, Dustin wakes up to find himself married to a talent manager managing somewhat-questionable talent.

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The bed dips as Steve turns, and Dustin probably could have made himself sleep through both the movement and the annoying buzzing noise, if not for Steve knocking things over as he fumbles for his cellphone on the nightstand. Dustin turns to squint at the alarm clock on his own bedside table – 1:43 the display tells him – as Steve finally manages to locate his phone and answer the call.

“You *fucker*,” he hisses into the darkness of the bedroom, obviously trying to keep his voice down for Dustin's sake as he pushes himself upright to lean against the headboard. “Where *the fuck* are you?!”

Richie, Dustin blearily thinks and sighs into the pillow. Steve tends to curse a lot whenever he's talking to *Richie*. It's like it rubs off on him.

“*Bangor*? What the hell is that? If that's a fucking mom joke—” There's a moment of silence as Steve listens to whatever *Richie*'s telling him on the other end of the line. “*Maine*,” he finally says, voice flat, and it's clear that he's repeating *Richie*'s answer back to him. “Fine. What's so important in fucking *Maine* that you walked out in the middle of a show and then didn't call me back for five days?!”

Dustin groggily turns and reaches out to rest his hand on whatever part of Steve is closest – his thigh, as it turns out – to help ground him, and Steve twitches in surprise.

“Shit, wait,” he says as Dustin gives him a gentle pat of apology.

“Richie, hold up, you’re in the hospital? Are you— *I don’t care if you’re not the patient! Are you okay? Why are you at the hospital?!’*”

There’s a long stretch of silence as Steve listens to Richie speak. If Dustin holds his breath he can barely hear Richie’s halting monologue, interrupted by moments of silence where it sounds like Richie’s gasping for air.

Steve keeps quiet for all of it, and then he bites his lip and says, sincerely, “I’m sorry to hear that.” Richie says something else, and Steve adds, “I don’t know, man. You never mentioned any of this before. But it’s good. That they’re both doing better, I mean.”

Sensing that the conversation probably won’t end any time soon, Dustin reaches out to turn on one of the bedside lamps. Steve’s gone quiet again, which must mean that Richie’s started on another monologue, and then he sucks in a sharp breath.

“You’re— oh. Uh, wow. Thank you for telling me.” Steve looks pained; judging by the muted sound escaping from the speaker of his phone, Dustin thinks Richie might be crying on the other end. “Of course I don’t mind. Why the fuck would I mind? I’m married. To a guy.”

Richie says something that makes Steve blink, eyebrows rising in disbelief as his eyes stray to Dustin. “Yes, Richie,” he says, shooting Dustin his can-you-believe-this-shit look. “Why would I be jok— It’s short for ‘Dustin’. Yeah, the guy you met last year. Yes, that Dustin. No, he’s not my assistant. Yes, I’m serious, you *dense* motherfucker.”

Dustin snorts a laugh into his pillow.

“So, uh, what brought this on? You’ve never— Yeah? The love of your life?” Steve reaches out to run his fingers through Dustin’s hair. “No, man, I get it.”

Dustin catches his hand, bringing it down to press his lips to Steve’s fingertips, and has to close his eyes in the face of the soft look on Steve’s face. Because fuck, sometimes he can’t help but think about the stupid kid he used to be – the one who nearly threw up all over himself at the thought of finally manning up and kissing Steve that

day by the pool so many years ago – and how that kid probably never in his wildest dreams would have ever thought that they'd end up here.

“Are you okay?” Steve asks, touching his fingertips to the side of Dustin’s face, and Dustin’s not completely sure if it’s meant for him or for Richie, but either way the question seems to get Richie going again.

Steve hums, cupping Dustin’s cheek and says, “Well, maybe if you’re nice to her she’ll let you back in to see him. No, Richie, that’s not how it works. I know, but she’s his wife—”

Dustin sighs, feeling himself start to drift back to sleep to the sound of Steve’s side of the conversation, and he just about there – lulled into it by the touch of Steve’s hand to his face – when he feels Steve suddenly grow still.

“Hold on, *what* tried to eat you?”

Dustin squints up at Steve, who’s wearing an expression of disbelief mixed with weary resignation.

“A clown,” he says, closing his eyes like it pains him to say it. “A spider-clown. Okay. No, that’s— Alright. Yeah, I— I get that that must’ve sucked. Are you, uh, safe now? Oh. Yeah, the restroom’s a— a good spot to hide.”

Dustin sighs and reaches out to take Steve’s hand again, giving it a squeeze. When Steve blinks his eyes open, Dustin mouths *Does he sound okay?* and Steve shakes his head. He looks like he’s about to reply when something on the other end of the line appears to catch his attention.

“Hey, is there someone else there with you? Richie, let me talk to them— Yes, I mean it. Richie, put them on— Hello? Yes, hi! Hi, I’m Steve, Richie’s manager. Are you—? Oh. It’s nice to meet you too, Ben.” Steve shoots Dustin a relieved look, which probably means Ben – whoever he is – sounds less manic than Richie does at the moment. “Is Richie alright? He’s been crying and I can’t really make out what he’s saying. Could you— Is he drunk? Or high? He was saying some

things earlier and I want to make sure—”

Ben must have replied then, because Dustin watches as a new look of concern blooms across Steve’s face.

“Uh, yeah, he *did* mention something about a clown.” Steve shoots Dustin a look, eyebrows raised. “Yeah. Yeah, that’s *crazy*. Must’ve been the shock, right. Definitely. Richie’s got a wild imagination...”

Ben makes quick work of cutting the call short once he takes over, but not before he promises Steve that he’ll see to it that Richie doesn’t do anything detrimental to his own well being, and assures him that it’s really not necessary for Steve to fly out there.

“Y’know,” Steve tells Dustin as he ends the call, “that’s probably the nicest way I’ve ever been told to fuck off and mind my own business.”

It’s a joke, but after all these years Dustin knows Steve well enough to pick up on his unease. He reaches out to grasp Steve’s wrist. “Put the phone away and tell me about it.”

They end up curled up together, Dustin with his arm wrapped around Steve, pulling him close as Steve rests his head on Dustin’s shoulder, and when he feels Steve reach out across Dustin’s chest to take his hand, Dustin spreads his fingers so that Steve can slip his own in between them.

They stay like that for a few moments, Steve silently rubbing his thumb over the skin of Dustin’s right hand while Dustin runs his left one up and down the smooth skin of Steve’s back. He can feel Steve’s heartbeat where his chest is pressed up against the side of Dustin’s own, and it’s a bit faster than it normal.

Dustin presses a kiss to Steve’s hair. “Tell me what Richie said,” he says.

Steve sighs. “He came out to me.”

Dustin had suspected as much from what he could hear from his side of the conversation, but now that Steve’s confirmed it Dustin takes a moment to consider it and yeah, that— makes a strange kind of

sense.

“There was an accident,” Steve continues, “and now two of his friends are in the hospital. One’s the— Richie called him the love of his life.” He huffs a shaky laugh. “Fuck, if I’m lucky he’ll give me a heads up before he uses a dick joke to come out on Twitter.”

Dustin rests his hand against the back of Steve’s neck, a steadying touch. “Did he say what happened?”

“No, not really. He said— They fought a clown. Not a ha-ha clown but, like, a demon clown. It turned into a spider at some point, I think.” Dustin can feel Steve’s heartbeat pick up again as he adds, “Richie’s friend didn’t want me to believe him.”

“That makes sense,” Dustin says, when all he can think of is men in lab coats and uniforms, and papers stating that nothing that happened had actually happened, just waiting for his signature on the dotted line.

“Yeah,” Steve says, and Dustin knows he’s remembering the same thing. “It felt the same. When he was telling me about it. I got this same kind of feeling—”

“Do you think it was—”

Steve shakes his head against Dustin’s chest. “No, it wasn’t— He was talking about aliens and child eating clowns. I don’t think the government was involved.” He gives a strangled laugh. “They, uh, bullied it to death. Should’ve tried that with the Demogorgon, right?”

“Steve—”

“I’m fine,” Steve says, but he doesn’t sound it, and Dustin’s honestly starting to not feel that great either.

“You think he was serious?” he asks, splaying a hand across the small of Steve’s back and pulling him closer.

“He sounded serious. Afraid. Shocked. Fuck, but he sounded afraid last year too, when he called me at fucking two in the afternoon because he thought the flowers were crawling out of the wallpaper.”

Steve sighs. “Fucking acid trip.”

“If it actually happened—“

“I know.”

“If the Upside Down—“

“Yeah, *I know*,” Steve says, and they lie silent in the dark for a minute or two, listening to nothing until the faint blare of police sirens in the distance cuts through the quiet. “Dustin?”

“Yeah?”

“I think I need to go to Maine.”

Dustin swallows around the jolt of fear that suddenly lances through him. “Yeah,” he agrees, and then adds, “I’m coming with you, just so you know.”

He can feel the warm exhale of Steve’s breath against his neck as Steve sighs, and then the soft press of Steve’s lips to the base of his throat.

“Wouldn’t have it any other way,” Steve tells him.

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Author's Note:

Me: *excludes crossovers using AO3 filters*

Also me: *writes Stranger Things/IT crossover*

Thank you for reading!

To be continued...????